

The University of Texas at Arlington

Time on His Side

Businessman, Philanthropist & College Graduate Earns Degrees of Success

In the summer of 1970, just six hours shy of graduation, John Merrill dropped out of the University of Texas at Arlington to pursue a business opportunity. “I was married, broke and had no possibility of parental support,” Merrill recalls. Within a year the business opportunity fizzled, followed by another failed venture the next year and a real estate fiasco after that.

Despite these setbacks, Merrill did not lose hope. “I still had 100 percent confidence in myself,” he says. “I knew that I could and would thrive in the right career.” Merrill would eventually find his niche in financial planning.

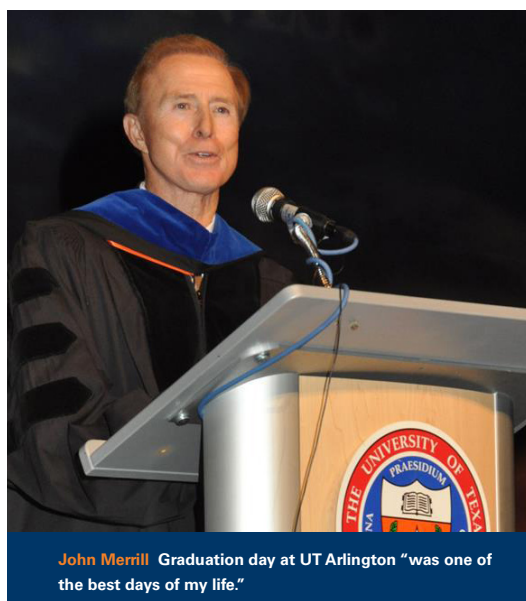
Still, while working for one of the largest financial planning organizations in Houston, Merrill was uncomfortable earning his paycheck through commissions on insurance and security sales. “I was selling to and not consulting with my clients,” Merrill says. “I wanted us both on the same side of the table.”

So in 1979, Merrill started Tanglewood Capital Management (now Tanglewood Wealth Management, Inc.), the first fee-only investment and financial planning firm in Houston. A pioneer of fee-only wealth management, Merrill now manages more than \$800 million in client assets, has authored five books on portfolio management, is a frequent guest on CNBC, and has been honored as a top advisor by *The Financial Times*, *Barron's* and *Worth* magazines.

Satisfied with his business success Merrill decided to focus once again on his education and after a 41-year break, re-enrolled at UT Arlington in 2011. Merrill completed the final six hours of his degree online and earned a Bachelor's of Science in University Studies in December 2011. Not only did Merrill walk across stage to earn his degree, he also gave the commencement address for the College of Business.

“I wanted to graduate for myself, for my mother, and for my employees,” says Merrill, now 66. “It was one of the very best days of my life.”

Merrill's commitment to education is also evident in his philanthropy. He has created three endowments at UT Arlington:



The *John Merrill Endowment* supports graduate fellowships in the College of Business, which appeals to Merrill because of graduate students' serious, disciplined and motivated approach to education.

The *John Merrill Endowment for Personal Finance/Financial Literacy* is designed to address the incredible lack of financial literacy in the United States, a situation that Merrill calls pathetic. “Parents don't teach financial literacy, high schools don't go far enough, and far too many college students don't know how to budget, evaluate college loans and pay-backs, handle credit cards, or evaluate career paths,” Merrill says. “I hope we can get

something started to begin to fill in this gap.”

The *John Merrill Endowed Professorship in Consultative Sales* addresses the role sales has played in Merrill's success. The Professorship will help attract a high-caliber sales professional to the College of Business faculty to drive UT Arlington's efforts to become a dominant force in sales education. “Sales has traditionally had a bad rap,” Merrill says. “Too many people associate it with the proverbial used car salesman. Consultative sales is always about putting the client first.” This is how Merrill built his business and how he sees U.S. companies competing with the best in the world.

To sustain and grow these endowments, Merrill has also provided a \$1 million planned gift to UT Arlington. “These gifts are about finding ways I can make a difference in other people's lives,” Merrill says, “both now and in the future.”